Plan-B’s ‘The Weird Play’ celebrates the vastness of love

BY JENIFER NII

I am an old person now, my body tells me. Often I wonder whether I have made good on the years it has given me. Then, inevitably, I question what might qualify as “making good.” A younger me would (did) list among life’s achievements, well, achievements of some sort. A fulfilling job done well. A healthy, shiny family tucked snugly into a paid-for home in an up-and-coming neighborhood. Making some kind of mark in the world that might distinguish me from the countless other beings trying to understand or justify our existence.

Now that I am old, though, I’ve come to believe that a life well-lived is one that is rooted less in stuff and situation and more in love — of, from, and for. I think I’m right about this, but I’ll be darned if I know — really know — what that means.

The Weird Play is my attempt to suss out this whole “love” thing. The who, what, when, where, and why of it. Because it’s everywhere, in all our closest, most important places: our families, friendships, romances, our faith. We can even find it in the fleeting interactions we have with strangers — those “might be” relationships that promise so much.

Love is something that transcends. As much as our experiences feel like revelations to us alone, we are not alone. The common, shared threads weave the fabric of love. Which is why I built The Weird Play the way I did, offering the most flexibility I could devise in its elements (the words, casting, stage settings, wardrobe, etc.) while pinpointing questions I think we all ask about the thing we long for most: love that is true and lasting, that fills the empty spaces.

In The Weird Play, the characters are named One, Two, and Three. There are no age or race specifications, and only the role of One is explicitly written for a woman. There are no “character descriptions” beyond what’s in the text. I did this because I’d hoped to allow for as much flexibility as possible, to see how different casts, comprised of various mixes of age, ethnicity, and gender might impact the experience of the play.

I was blessed to have three readings of the play before we locked the script, each featuring different casts. The first comprised two men (one African American, one Caucasian) and a woman. The second featured three women (all Caucasian). The final cast is all female: Susanna Florence (One), Dee-Dee Darby-Duffin (Two), and April Fossen (Three). The age range among the three casts was late 20’s to late 40’s.

Jenifer Nii’s plays WALLACE (co-written with Debora Threedy), THE SCARLET LETTER, SUFFRAGE, RUFF!, and KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (music by Dave Evanoff) have premiered at Plan-B Theatre Company, where THE WEIRD PLAY premieres March 1-11 in a co-production with Sackerson. Tickets and information at planbtheatre.org.